

Bill would end non-medical exemption for vaccinations

By Gary A. Warner
WesCom News Service

SALEM — A bipartisan bill to remove nonmedical exemptions for vaccinations required for children attending public schools was introduced in the House on Friday.

House Bill 3063 would remove personal, philosophical and religious reasons as grounds for granting exemptions from vaccinations.

Children would not be forced to be vaccinated, but would not be allowed to attend public schools if their parents refused to have them vaccinated.

The move occurs after an outbreak of measles in Washington that spread to Oregon, sickening at least 70 children so far. Four children in Oregon have been diagnosed with measles.

The outbreak of measles this year was linked to children who had intentionally not been vaccinated. Oregon has the highest rate in the nation of kindergartners who have not been vaccinated for non-medical reasons, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The bill was drafted by Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, with Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, and Sen. Chuck Thomsen, R-Hood River, as chief co-sponsors.

“We should close this loophole that places children, families and communities at risk of illness and death from diseases that were nearly eliminated just a generation ago.”

— Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend

“I believe in science, the safety of our children and in sensible, fact-based public policy,” Helt said. “We should close this loophole that places children, families and communities at risk of illness and death from diseases that were nearly eliminated just a generation ago.”

Gov. Kate Brown would sign the bill if passed by the Legislature, according to Kate Kondayen, a spokesperson for the governor.

A measles vaccine has been available since 1963, and a combined measles-mumps-rubella vaccine since 1971. According to the Centers for Disease Control, from 1958 to 1962, the United States averaged 503,282 cases and 432 deaths associated with measles each year. By 1982, the CDC reported a record low 1,697 cases.

But beginning in the late 1990s, an increasing number

of parents opted against vaccinating their children. Some believed vaccinations were linked to an increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

The Oregon Health Authority reported earlier this month that the percentage of students in public schools who have exemptions rose from just over 1 percent in 1998 to 7 percent in 2018.

A number of medical studies have been published that refute a tie between vaccinations and autism. The CDC website says, “Some parents might worry that the vaccine causes autism. Signs of autism typically appear around the same time that children are recommended to receive the MMR vaccine. Vaccine safety experts, including experts at CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), agree that MMR vaccine is not responsible for increases in the number of children with autism.”

Despite the findings, groups advocating for parental choice, known as “anti-vaxxers” in political circles, have been successful in keeping nonmedical exemptions in the state law.

Proponents of HB 3063 say that parents who opt out put children at risk.

“Responsible citizens do

not have the right to risk the safety of others, particularly children, due to misinformation and fear,” Helt said. “This proposal will save lives and will combat the disgraced idea that medically safe vaccinations pose a greater risk to public health than the dangerous diseases that they are proven to prevent.”

The bill follows action in Washington, where the Health Care and Wellness Committee has approved House Bill 1638. If passed, it bans personal or philosophical exemptions for the MMR vaccine.

The Washington Senate has introduced Senate Bill 5841, which would extend the ban to cover all school-mandated vaccines, not just the one for measles.

Before the measles outbreak, the Oregon Legislature was considering bills that would have tightened requirements for parents who wanted to opt-out of vaccinations. House Bill 2783, now before the House Health Care Committee, would require a parent who declines immunization for their child to submit documents to school administrators that includes a health care practitioner’s signed statement verifying that the dangers of not immunizing the child have been explained.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Natural Resource committee to meet

Baker County’s Natural Resources Advisory Committee will meet Tuesday, Feb. 26, at 1 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Running seminar set for Wednesday

A free seminar for runners of all ages and abilities, whether avid, recreational or first-timers, is set for Wednesday, Feb. 27 from 6:45 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. in Studio 1 at the YMCA Fitness Center, 3715 Pochontas Road.

Blake Marlia, a physical therapist and longtime runner, will discuss a variety of topics, including:

- Understanding current running trends and methods to prevent injuries
- Key concepts to running form
- The importance of cadence
- The different between short-distance and long-distance running techniques
- Simple exercises to improve running form and avoid injuries
- Suggestions for running footwear

City’s public works committee meeting

Baker City’s Public Works Advisory Committee will meet Monday, Feb. 25 at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

The committee will review capital plans for 2019 for water, sewer and streets.

Baker City Tree Board meets Wednesday

Baker City’s Tree Board will meet Wednesday, Feb. 27 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St. The board will discuss a planned inventory of trees in the city, and a street tree guide.

City to discuss budget issues March 5

Baker City’s interim budget board will meet Tuesday, March 5 at 6 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St..

Jeanie Dexter, the city’s finance director, will give a presentation about the city’s budgeting process, the status of the budget for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, and a three-year forecast for the city’s general fund, which includes the police and fire departments.

Kent Bailey, a CPA with Guyer and Associates, the city’s auditor, will also give a presentation.

COUNCIL

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Also on Tuesday, councilors will discuss House Bill 2020, the carbon cap and trade system under discussion in the Oregon Legislature.

The Legislature’s Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction will have a video hearing at 5 p.m. today at the Community Events Center, 2600 East St., to take public testimony on the bill.

City Manager Fred Warner Jr. has written a letter expressing his concerns about how the bill, if it becomes law, could harm the local economy, most particularly Ash Grove Cement Co.’s plant at Durkee.

Councilors could also decide to send a letter to the legislative committee regarding House Bill 2020.

RECORD

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As of this morning, February’s precipitation total at the Airport was 1.52 inches.

That’s more than double the long-time monthly average of 0.63 of an inch, and it ranks second on the all-time list behind only 1986’s total of 1.66 inches.

With snow still falling, and the parade of storms forecast to continue, that record probably will fall this week.

The persistently cold, wet weather has had a dramatic

effect on mountain snowpacks since Feb. 1.

At Schneider Meadows north of Halfway, for instance, the snow depth has increased from 60 inches on Feb. 1 to 114 inches this morning.

The water content of the snow has risen from 18.1 inches to 32.5 inches.

At Eilertson Meadow, in the Elkhorn Mountains west of Haines, the snow depth has doubled, from 30 inches on Feb. 1 to 60 inches this morning. The water content, at 14.9 inches, is 62 percent above average.

OBITUARIES

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Andy Pinard

Oxbow, 1975-2019

He was preceded in death by his grandparents, Theresa Langella and Ruth Pinard; his stepfather, Stan Thompson; his brother, Mitchell Thompson; one feisty squirrel, a handful of fire ants, and the Oakland Raiders.

Those who would like to make a memorial donation may do so to help defray service expense through Tami’s Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences may be made at www.tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com

Two lawmakers demoted for disrespectful behavior

By Sarah Zimmerman
Associated Press

SALEM — A leader of the Oregon Legislature demoted two lawmakers on Thursday for disrespectful and rude behavior as the statehouse struggles to make itself a more respectful workplace.

Rep. Mitch Greenlick, a Portland Democrat, called a pharmaceutical lobbyist “stupid” during a health care committee hearing Tuesday on a drug pricing bill. House Speaker Tina Kotek, also a Portland Democrat, responded by removing Greenlick as chairman of the committee and from membership in the House Conduct Committee.

Kotek also removed Rep. Bill Post, a Keizer Republican, from the House Judiciary Committee after he called a state senator “cray-cray” on Twitter and sent a tweet inviting gun-rights advocates to a gun-control rally at the Capitol, with the words, “be ready, be there.”

Post later called his comments a “miscommunication,” but added that “free speech, whether we like it or not, is

free speech.”

The actions came as the Legislature’s leaders are attempting to create a more respectful environment after the state Bureau of Labor and Industries said in a civil rights complaint last month that they didn’t stop repeated sexual harassment by a state senator. Sen. Jeff Kruse, a Republican, resigned last year and maintains his innocence.

Greenlick apologized at the hearing for calling a lobbyist stupid. Rep. Christine Drazen of Clackamas County, a Republican on the committee, responded that lawmakers “have been through extensive training about equity and respectful workplace. We are working on issues around capitol culture and what I have seen here today troubles me deeply.”

She criticized Greenlick for demeaning other people from

a position of power. Greenlick shot back that it would have been better if Drazen had made her criticisms to him in private.

Republicans said Greenlick’s behavior contributed to a “disrespectful atmosphere” in the statehouse. They boycotted a meeting Wednesday addressing harassment and inappropriate behavior in the capitol. They later demanded Greenlick be stripped of his leadership position.

Kotek announced the demotions in an email to lawmakers and later addressed the situation on the House floor.

“As my actions show today, I think the response to inappropriate action should be swift and as decisive as possible,” she said, though she accused Republicans of overblowing the Greenlick incident for political purposes.

“The way that his actions

were politicized sets a dangerous precedent,” Kotek said.

House Republican Leader Rep. Carl Wilson of Grants Pass said in a statement Thursday that Republicans look “forward to working to change the culture to allow all Oregonians to feel safe and welcome in their Capitol.”

On Feb. 13, Greenlick attended respectful workplace training with other lawmakers given by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, said Kotek’s spokesman, Danny Moran.

Lobbyists and a couple of journalists attended a different version of the training the same day. It provided a glimpse into both the type of training and the situations faced by lobbyists.

Hundreds of lobbyists filled downtown Salem’s Grand Theater, where Linda Li, outreach and education coordina-

tor for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, stood on stage with a PowerPoint presentation.

Some of the training on recognizing bad behavior was so basic that Li acknowledged it was like teaching civility to kindergartners. She dropped a pen in front of one audience member and politely asked him to pick it up; then dropped it again and commanded him to retrieve it. “How does that make you feel,” she asked.

After Li flashed a slide

on the giant screen behind her that described “abusive behavior” — yelling, throwing things in anger, spreading false rumors, sabotaging work or reputation, swearing at people — one lobbyist rose her hand and said that’s common behavior among lawmakers. Others in the audience murmured their assent.

Li told the audience she’d be showing the same slide to lawmakers in a different training session, and that hopefully they’d learn from it.

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